

# Introduction

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Time and space are the yin and yang of photography. Space was a preoccupation of the modernist era in photography studies, obsessed with medium-specific issues turned towards indexicality and (lacking or, on the contrary, renewed) aura. The more you press on space, the more the notion of time will return with a vengeance—and vice versa, as will become clear in most of the essays gathered in this collection. The traditional definition of the photographic image as a slice of time and space, which has long been used to foreground the idea of photography as spatial framing rather than as temporal reinterpretation of the pictured object, has been dramatically questioned by the encounter of, on the one hand, postmodern reflections on the importance of spectatorship and reading and, on the other hand, a better informed rereading of premodern photographic practices, devices, and cultures, in which the reduction of photography to a slice of time has rapidly become anachronistic. Photographic studies, in this sense, display and obey the same evolution as one can observe in other fields of visibility such as film studies or comics studies, in which comparable convergences between very contemporary interrogations on matters of (social) meaning and new approaches to the history of the medium, no longer as mere technology but as social practice, have similarly expanded the relevance of what is being studied.

The essays brought together in this book all testify to the ongoing project of redefining the photographic field as epitomized by the new interest in time. Yet, this notion of time escapes, in many senses, the merely technical mode that has played such a paramount role in the history of medium, where issues of time reduction have been instrumental in the production of the hegemonic view of photography as a slice of time: reduction of shutter time (a problem of optics), reduction of development time (a problem of chemistry), and reduction of processing time, between the taking of the picture and its social circulation in printed form (a problem of industrial management). The gradual speeding up of all these processes is underway, and their convergence has become (almost) complete in today's world of instant taking and global circulation of any image whatsoever. At least from a theoretical point of view, for in practice things are less clear-cut. There are

now other elements, more specifically legal and copyright elements that produce an opposite phenomenon of slowing down, if not the social destruction of many images. However, the global feeling of such a speeding-up has formed a vision of photography that matched perfectly certain high-modernist views on the image as timeless or purely 'present'—all these words are heavily burdened with manifold connotations which many essays in this book carefully disentangle—that has lost today any real use value. It is the critical discussion of this blindness to the complexity of photography's temporalities, for it is no longer possible to use the word 'time' in singular, that is at the heart of this book.

However, the aim of these essays is less to criticize or to deconstruct the exclusive focus on spatiality and visuality in a now old-fashioned paradigm. Instead of simply questioning what went wrong in certain excesses of a narrowly defined medium-specific approach (which was also an exaggeratedly philosophical and pictorially art historical point of view), the authors share the common endeavor of laying bare the many forms of time and temporality that shape photography as a complex social process, which is not just a technique, an art, or a way of picture-making, but also a dream, an idea, a political device, in short an object that is by definition hybrid and networked: things, people, technology, and institutions, both synchronically and diachronically are intertwined and produce social meanings and interactions that evolve in time and through time. Moreover, the rediscovery of the temporal multilayeredness of the photographic image has made room for the new reading of time aspects within the photographic image itself, which is never just a slice of time, even if it is now possible to consider this duration in the almost non-duration of nanoseconds. Once again: the more one tries to put time between brackets, the more it will come back and occupy the whole field, both the whole field of vision and the field of photography studies in a more general sense.

The essays in this book discuss these issues in a wide range of photographic objects and practices, as well as from different perspectives. Some of them deal primarily, if not only with time, others demonstrate how time slowly emerges as an indispensable critical category for the analysis of specific images or specific ways of picturing. This diversity, which is part of the richness of the collection, does not prevent all authors from taking a similar stance on the central place of time in thinking photography. A first section, 'Time and Technology / Devices for Time', brings together three essays whose objects cover the whole history of

the medium—from the emerging photographic experiments by Talbot and the 19th century craze of ghost photography to the digital reshaping of the world by postmodern artists such as David Claerbout and Jeff Wall. Each of them tackles however one and the same question: How to fix time? How to stop what is on the verge of disappearing? How to produce an image of the instantaneous? In her essay, 'Fixing Transience: Photography and other Images of Time in 1830s London', Chitra Ramalingam situates the early history of photography in Britain against the context of the contemporary scientific fascination with transience. She does so through the figure of William Henry Fox Talbot, whose ideas about the meaning of photographic instantaneity were shaped by his experience with non-photographic experimental imaging practices. These techniques all centered on causing a transient event to leave a fixed trace on a sensitive surface, and like photography were understood as providing a new means of visualizing, recording and representing time. Ramalingam argues that what we might consider to be distinctively photographic approaches to time—in particular the long exposure and the instantaneous image—had important analogues and predecessors in these inscription practices emerging from early 19th century experimental science. Drawing upon deconstruction and psychoanalysis, Louis Kaplan's 'Spooked Time: The Temporal Dimensions of Spirit Photography' (reprinted from *The Strange Case of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer*, Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2008) focuses on the temporal dimension of spirit photography. Stressing the untimeliness of the ghostly he analyses the complex temporal structure of spirit photographs as fixations of a past moment and a promise of future immortality by the depiction of a revenant. Therefore Kaplan speculates about Mumler's spirit photography in relationship to the uncanny (Sigmund Freud's haunted concept of the *unheimlich*), psychoanalytic discourses of mourning and bereavement, and haunting or *hauntology* (as articulated by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx*). The strange case of William Mumler, who was the subject of a sensational trial in New York in spring 1869, is placed in the context of the religious doctrines of Spiritualism and against the historical backdrop of the American Civil War. In 'Modern Time: Revisiting the Tableau', Joanna Lowry discusses the device of the tableau, which has a long history in painting as a narrative construction for the representation of significant moments in time. The *photographic* tableau holds added complexity, based as it is upon technologies that have their own implicit relationship to the actual production of ideas about time. Through a discussion of selected examples of photographic works by Michael Snow, Jeff Wall and David Claerbout that

are based upon the depiction of an instantaneous 'event'—as a moment of pure referentiality that threatens conventional discourses of pictorial representation—Lowry discusses the way in which these artists use the photographic tableau to comment upon our contemporary relationship to time itself.

The second part of the book, 'Returning Time / Memory / Order', turns toward the reading of the image, which ceases rapidly to be a simple reading and proves to be a process of rereading, if not of meditation. Essays in this section question the tension between fixed images, whose temporality seems to be reducible to one single moment, and the dizzying profusion of temporal layers that is being constructed through the photograph's proper content (images can 'show' time, both past and present), the montage of the image in larger series and in combination with other images (pictures are not only made for exhibitions, where they are seen in splendid isolation on white walls in white cubes, they can address different audiences in permanently shifting formats and contexts), or the clash between, for instance, production time and reception time (for the 'here and now' of the photographer is never that of the spectator). Beginning with Roland Barthes' observation that 'cameras...were clocks for seeing' Graham Smith examines 'Time and Memory in William Henry Fox Talbot's Calotypes of Oxford and David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson's of St Andrews'. In consideration of Fox Talbot's interest in the function of time in the process of photography, Smith focuses on three photographs of Oxford revealing the manner in which time is either embedded or embodied in them. Hill and Adamson's depictions of St Andrews Cathedral ruins make time visible and offer a historical narrative of pre-Reformation Scotland. In 'Between Present and Past: Photographic Portugal of the 1950s' (an edited version, originally published in *Image [&] Narrative*, IX-3, 2008: <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/Timeandphotography.be/martins.html>), Susana S. Martins argues that the image of a place is always formed by a great variety of cultural mediations, where photographs play a crucial role. Considering photographic travel books on Portugal published during the 1950s and the 1960s, the author analyzes these cultural objects as 'time-structured' and 'time-proposing' devices, before examining their relevance in the building and spreading of national narratives. Departing from some visual examples, Martins investigates how photographs contribute to the creation, maintenance or denial of recurrent Portuguese historical fictions. Her essay clearly demonstrates how ideological frames can also be understood as a matter of time. Maren Polte's essay, 'Time and Order:

Self-reflective Strategies in Photo Essays', examines how, using the specific instruments of their profession, photographers have been exploring the role of pictures in our picture-ridden society. The essay discusses the auto-reflective strategies employed by five germanophone artists (Hans Peter Feldmann, Jens Hagen, Wiebke Loeper, Peter Fischli and David Weiss). Between them, they display a remarkable variety of narrative concepts—not inferior in precision, and superior in emotional impact, to word-based analysis.

The essays in the third section, 'Cinematic Time / Duration and Fragment', reconsider the notion of time and temporality from a more intermedial point of view. Already present in various other articles of this book, intermediality issues come to the fore when the photographic medium is analyzed in the light of its analogies and differences with other, both similar and dissimilar, media such as film, a medium that, like photography, is characterized by an inherent tension between stillness and movement. In this section, the authors take as their starting point a certain number of challenges posed by the contrast between the narrative and the nonnarrative. Inevitably, this perspective forces them to reconsider all major theoretical statements on the specificity of the medium that have been foregrounded since the rise of photography theory as an independent field—but not as a field theorized independently of other media such as film, painting, theater, performance, illustration, and narrative. Corollary, issues of fictionality and the documentary value of photography are also paramount in this section. Understanding the coda of Michelangelo Antonioni's film *The Eclipse* as an assemblage of photographs, Victor Burgin, in 'The Eclipse of Time', questions the distinction traditionally made between photographic time and filmic time, between clock time and subjective time. The complex temporal structure of photography, so Burgin argues, is not reducible to a specific quality which can be considered in opposition to the temporal character of other media such as film but depends always on socio-historical conventions within a society and the subjective use of a spectator. 'Suspended Relationships: The Montage Photography Books of Moshe Raviv Vorobeichic' by Andrea Nelson analyzes two photography books (*Paris* and *Wilna*) by Lithuanian photographer Moshe Raviv Vorobeichic, who often worked under the pseudonym Moï Ver. Nelson's essay investigates the manner in which the photography book's relation to time is suspended somewhere between that of the singular photograph and the projected filmstrip. Nelson argues that Vorobeichic's books are structured by the logic of montage: the individual page spreads

comprised of juxtaposed images must be read in relation to one another, and the compelling sequencing of each book disrupts any sense of traditional narrative progression, presenting an alternative to standard constructions of history. In his contribution, David Green tackles time in and through photography during the heydays of Minimalist art, in which the discussion of time became an absolutely central issue, both aesthetic and ideological, in visual and performing arts. Commencing with a re-reading of Michael Fried's 'Art and Objecthood', David Green examines 'An image of an image': Photography and Robert Morris's *Continuous Project Altered Daily*. He argues that Fried's notion of the modernist artwork as 'instantaneously present' is analogous to the photographic image and, for that very reason, antithetical to minimalist sculpture, which is characterized by endlessness and a preoccupation with duration. Robert Morris's 'The Present Tense of Space' and other projects of that period are presented in response to Fried. Green stipulates that despite Morris's attack on the photographic recording of site sculpture, Morris produced a number of earlier 'anti-form' works, which used photography in such a way that complicates a distinction between the work itself and its documentary recording. The frontier between images and images of images becomes blurred, and this complexity underscores the crucial importance of the debates on time and photography for the larger debates on art and temporality in general. Although devoted to a very limited, yet culturally and theoretically key corpus of contemporary art and thinking, David Green's essay is a fitting closing point to this volume in which we have tried to think time through the lens of temporality and vice versa, yet always with a strong emphasis on the cultural context and framing of the images under analysis.